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PARTNER OR MODEL? THE LATIN-AMERICAN PERCEPTION OF THE EU IN THE SUPRANATIONAL AUDIOVISUAL POLICIES

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ABSTRACT:

The EU has a strong influence on the development of audiovisual policies in Latin America. The paper investigates how the EU is perceived by Latin-American audiovisual institutions in two different supranational regions: Mercosur and Ibero-America. The findings are based on a literature review, qualitative document analysis, and semi-structured expert interviews. It reveals a lack of definition of the EU image where RECAM did not concretely define the EU and engaged in a blind policy transfer process, while Ibermedia perceives the EU as a strategic partner and seeks cooperation with mutual benefits. The paper provides a deeper understanding of what the EU model means to Latin America, going beyond its institutional framework, and proposes a reflection on the EU perception and how it could lead to different forms of dialogue.

Keywords: audiovisual policy ▪ Mercosur ▪ European Union ▪ Latin America ▪ perception

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) is an influential actor in Latin America. The creation of the South American trade bloc, the Mercosur, was inspired by the European Union (Dri, 2010; Medeiros, Meunier, & Cockles, 2015; Santander, 2005), as well as its supranational institution in charge of audiovisual policies, RECAM, that also aimed, since its creation, to learn from the EU experience (Canedo & Crusafon, 2014; Fernandes, Loisen, & Donders, 2020; Vlassis, 2016). The milestone of this relationship was the Audiovisual Mercosur Program (AMP), which aimed to transfer the EU model of supranational audiovisual policies to Mercosur, but it was incomplete and with modest accomplishments (Canedo, Loiola, & Pauwels, 2015; Fernandes, Loisen,

& Donders, 2021). At the Ibero-American level, the most important program to support audiovisual production, the Ibermedia Program, was inspired by the European MEDIA Program (Camacho, 2016; Falicov, 2012). Clearly, the European Union has a notable role in shaping the supranational audiovisual policies in Latin America.

Previous research mainly focused on the results of these policies (González, 2020; Moguillansky, 2011), cooperations (Canedo & Crusafon, 2014), and in the EU motivations in engaging on it (Vlassis, 2016). Little attention has been given to the Latin-American perspective towards the EU. Since the EU is still an influence in this region (Sanahuja & Rodríguez, 2019) and a reference to the audiovisual policies (Crusafon, 2009), the paper aims to investigate how the EU is perceived in the Latin-American supranational spaces (Fioramonti & Poletti, 2008) and how this image is articulated in the audiovisual policies. What are the main ideas implied when the EU is mentioned? Are they the same in different supranational spaces? Are there specific goals, ideas, mechanisms that motivated this dialogue? In sum, how is the EU defined, and what is envisaged when searching for a dialogue with it? In doing so, the paper provides a critical reflection on what the EU represents in the Latin-American context and contributes to a better understanding of what can be expected from this cooperation.

In order to do that, I investigated the ideas associated with the EU in two supranational Latin-American spaces: the Mercosur and the Ibero-American space. Based on literature review, qualitative document analysis, and semi-structured expert interviews, the paper provides a deeper understanding of how the EU is perceived by Latin America, going beyond a mere institutional or formal framework. This paper is an exploratory study that proposes a reflection on the EU perception and how it could lead to different forms of dialogue.

The article is structured as follows. First, the ideas involving the EU and its cooperation with Mercosur are exposed. Second, the methodology is outlined. Third, the findings are presented. The findings reveal a distinct perception of the EU at Mercosur and the Ibero-American space. RECAM lacks clarity in defining the EU and engaged in a blind policy transfer of audiovisual policies to access resources and to follow a broader cooperation agreement at the Mercosur level promoted by the EU. In contrast, in the Ibero-American space, the EU is perceived as a strategic partner where cooperation is beneficial for both. The results indicate the flexibility, or lack of definition, of the EU image.

2. EU AS A GLOBAL ACTOR

The European Union is a result of a long process of integration that started with an internal focus and was marked by closure (de Beus, 2010) to a shift towards external policies where it positions as a global actor (Lucarelli & Fioramonti, 2010). It is composed of a set of institutions that promotes political and economic integration among the member countries. Besides its institutional structure, the EU has also a symbolic

dimension based on the ideas and values that it promotes, and it aims to spread its model of society (Olsen, 2002).

The EU portrays itself as a different global actor, with a global responsibility to spread universal values (Lucarelli & Fioramonti, 2010), such as democracy, human rights, pluralism, and fundamental freedoms (Manners, 2002). The values are promoted as universal and are part of a civilian foreign policy in opposition to a military one (Söderbaum, Stålgren, & Van Langenhove, 2005). The EU would like to be perceived as a benevolent global actor although there are criticisms in accessing its distinctiveness (Cerutti & Lucarelli, 2008). Thus, the consolidation of its image is interrelated with its external perception and the EU seeks to export its 'model' to reinforce its legitimization (Radaelli, 2000; Santander, 2001; Söderbaum, Stålgren, & Van Langenhove, 2005).

Cultural diplomacy plays a decisive role in the promotion of EU values (Portolés, 2019). This strategy was reinforced with the approval of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (hereafter the 2005 UNESCO Convention) followed by the European Agenda for Culture in a Globalizing World (2007) that recognizes the role of the EU as a promoter of its ideas in external policy (Loisen & De Ville, 2011; Vlassis, 2016).

The main ideas are the recognition of the two dimensions of cultural goods, their economic character but also their symbolic value. Thus, cultural products should not be negotiated by the free market rules, since they also carry cultural values. The EU acts as an international promoter of the 2005 UNESCO Convention and "seeks to promote cultural norms as part of its international economic and cultural relations" (Vlassis, 2020, p.19).

The main impact of the Convention was on the audiovisual sector due to its economic importance. The US did not sign the Convention and is constantly advocating for the liberalization of audiovisual services. Thus, the EU is in opposition to the US interest and the Hollywood domination of the audiovisual flows.

The EU audiovisual policy is based on this idea and combines a complex set of instruments and regulations to promote economic integration and assure cultural diversity (Donders, Loisen, & Pauwels, 2014). Besides the internal policies, the EU also advocates for audiovisual cooperation as a tool to promote diversity (Vlassis, 2016). One of the strategies to promote the internationalization of the EU audiovisual policy is through technical cooperation, which is the case of the cooperation with Mercosur (Crusafon, 2015). Thus, the EU has its own interests and actively invests in exporting its model.

3. EU AS A MODEL TO MERCOSUR

The Mercosur is the Common Market of the South created in 1991 by the Treaty of Asuncion (Mercosur, 1991) to establish a free-trade region among Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. It aims to create a common region with ambitious goals to

promote integration among the countries. The EU is the major donor of Mercosur and was the first global actor to recognize it as a bloc.

The Mercosur perceives the EU as a model for supranational integration and, in that respect, was inspired by it (Dri, 2010; Medeiros et al., 2015; Santander, 2005). One month after the creation of Mercosur, a delegation visited the European Commission to develop a close relationship (Dri, 2010). One year later, the Inter-Institutional Agreement between the European Commission and Mercosur was signed; a set of agreements followed reinforcing the influence of the EU on Mercosur (Santander, 2005). These agreements enable training and technical and financial assistance where “the EU has tried to shape Mercosur according to its own programs and values” (Dri, 2010, p.59). Thus, the influence of the EU on Mercosur is perceived since its creation. Therefore, Mercosur perceives the EU as a model while at the same time the EU aims to export its model as an international strategy (Radaelli, 2000) and invested in the relationship with Mercosur. Thus, there is an alignment between the Mercosur perception of the EU as a model and the EU's self-promoted image as a model to be exported.

On the cultural level, Mercosur signed the Protocol for Cultural Integration in 1996 recognizing the importance of culture and respect for diversity in regard to the integration project. It agrees to promote cooperation and cultural exchange among members and to support the search for external funding and technical assistance (Mercosul, 1996). At the 1999 Rio Summit, the EU and Mercosur included cultural cooperation in the political and economic goals. The ideas included “diversity as a fundamental link of integration” (Summit, 1999, p.7) where the regions should act to “promote cultural diversity and pluralism in the world” (Summit, 1999, p.8).

In 2008, the Declaration of Mercosur Cultural Integration was approved, reinforcing its commitment to the cultural diversity promoted by the 2005 UNESCO Convention (Mercosul, 2008). The EU also had a role in cultural diplomacy, negotiating the 2005 UNESCO Convention, and engaged in cultural cooperation based on the diversity idea. The bloc followed the EU ideas about that. Besides the institutional and budgetary differences, there is a match concerning the ideas (Canedo, 2016).

Aligned with the Cultural Protocol, the advisory body for audiovisual, RECAM, was created in 2003 to promote audiovisual integration and legislative harmonization (Mercosur, 2003). RECAM is the main institution for Mercosur's audiovisual sector and it was also largely inspired by the EU audiovisual policies (Crusafon, 2009; Domínguez & Montero, 2009). RECAM recognizes the cultural and economic value of audiovisual and reinforces its commitment to “apply the common principle of cultural diversity” (RECAM, 2004a, p.1).

Since its creation, RECAM has not only been searching for a dialogue with the EU but also has been looking to it as a point of reference (Fernandes et al., 2020). The milestone of its relationship was the Audiovisual Mercosur Program (AMP) that aimed to transfer the EU MEDIA Program to Mercosur but could just achieve incremental results (Canedo & Crusafon, 2014; Canedo et al., 2015; Fernandes et al., 2021).

It is possible to observe an alignment between the EU and Mercosur ideas on the three dimensions, the institutional broader framework of Mercosur, the cultural position based on cultural diversity, and the audiovisual sector aiming to integrate the market and promote cultural diversity. As shown in Figure 1, there is a match at the level of ideas between the two blocs and cooperation agreements in all these levels.

Table 1: EU and Mercosur ideas (source: author)

IDEAS	EU	Mercosur	Dialogue
Institutional	model to be exported	EU as a model	Regional Indicative Programme (2007)
Cultural	cultural diversity	cultural diversity	1999 Rio Summit 2005 Unesco Convention
Audiovisual	cultural and economic	cultural and economic	Audiovisual Mercosur Program (2008)

The relationship between the EU and Mercosur involves a set of instruments that aims to establish political dialogue, development cooperation, and free trade. The negotiation is still ongoing and it could strengthen the Mercosur integration process (Sanahuja & Rodríguez, 2019).

In the audiovisual sector, the internationalization of audiovisual policy reflects a dimension of Europeanization (Crusafon, 2015). Europeanization is broadly understood as an influence of the EU institutions in shaping policies on different levels, internally and externally (Olsen, 2002). Europeanization produces policy changes in a process that can occur top-down or bottom-up (Börzel & Risse, 2000). This movement creates policy convergence and is also supposed to bring learning (Radaelli, 2008). However, the most evident convergence is at the discourse level, which does not imply convergence of decisions (Radaelli, 2008).

The policies drawn from the EU indicate aspirational movements since the receivers perceived them as functional or legitimate, and the access to resources can make the EU ideas more attractive (Olsen, 2002), but drawing from an abstract model can create more projection and aspiration than learning (Armstrong, 2006).

The auto-representation of the EU was largely researched, however, its external perception is still underdeveloped (Fioramonti & Poletti, 2008; Lucarelli & Fioramonti, 2010; Serban & Harutyunyan, 2020) and can vary according to the topic or the region (Chaban, Elgström, Kelly, & Yi, 2013). It has an important role in Latin America and is considered to be a model, a partner, or a threat (Pecequillo, 2014). Recent research also indicates that the Latin-American perception of the EU is less influenced by ideas but rather focused on material investment and expertise access (Serban & Harutyunyan, 2020).

The paper will investigate how the EU is perceived and articulated in the audiovisual policies in Latin America. The aim is not to assess if there is a Europeanization,

but the challenges involved in it will be used to shed light on this process and broaden the debate.

4. METHODOLOGY

This paper aims to investigate how the EU is perceived by analyzing the ideas associated with it. The main focus is on Mercosur's audiovisual policies since it has several agreements with the EU and an audiovisual program based on policy transfer. Complementary Ibero-American documents will be added to expand the perception of the EU in Latin America.

To understand how the EU is perceived in the Latin-American audiovisual domain, 75 (1995 – 2021) documents were analyzed based on qualitative document analysis (Puppis, 2019; Karppinen & Moe, 2012). The data collected start from the Interregional Framework Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Mercosur signed in 1995 to date. All documents concerning the RECAM, AMP, and Ibermedia were included to assess how the EU is perceived internally by these programs. Additionally, the cultural cooperation agreements between the EU and Mercosur that impact the audiovisual sector were included. The analyzed data are composed of 3 documents on cultural agreements, all RECAM documents, including 37 meeting minutes and 13 work plans, 3 documents related to the AMP, the cooperation agreement, the report evaluation of the program, and the Regional Indicative Programme (RIP) which the Audiovisual Mercosur Program (AMP) is part of. On the Ibero-American level, 15 official documents were analyzed, including the creation of Ibermedia, its reports, and the cooperation agreement between CAACI and EFAD. All of these documents are publicly available in English, Spanish, or Portuguese.

Additionally, to balance the lack of references to the EU in the Ibero-American audiovisual documents and considering that Ibermedia is a program with strong stakeholder participation, interviews were included in the analysis. Then, 16 Ibero-American producers and directors from 15 countries¹ were interviewed between January and March 2021. All interviews were conducted online by the author of the study. The interviewees were selected randomly from the database of films funded by Ibermedia and all were invited to recommend additional interviewees, creating a snowball effect (Van Audenhove & Donders, 2019). The interviews were conducted in Portuguese and Spanish where the same question was asked: “Do you consider the EU as a strategic partner to the development of Ibero-American audiovisual? If yes, how?”. This was an open question that aimed to identify if there is an openness to the EU audiovisual policies and what ideas implied as well as the form of dialogue proposed. At the request of some interviewees and in order to ensure open, honest conversation, the interviews were anonymized. The interviews provided a deeper

¹ Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Spain.

and contextualized comprehension (see Van Audenhove & Donders, 2019; Herzog and Ali, 2015) of the perception of the EU audiovisual policies identified through the document analysis. In the Mercosur case, the documents were the main source of analysis since they relied extensively on the EU and the dialogue with the EU came from a top-down perspective where the audiovisual sector was not actively involved. Figure 2 presents the data analyzed according to the topic it deals with. Relevant scientific literature was added to the analysis to provide a deeper contextualization.

The findings will be presented in two sections. First, the Mercosur perception of the EU on audiovisual policies will be represented by RECAM and the cooperation program with the EU, the Audiovisual Mercosur Program (AMP). Secondly, the Ibero-American space is represented by Ibermedia, its institutional authority, the Conference of Ibero-American Cinematographic Activities (CAACI), and Ibero-American producers.

Table 2: Data collected and analyzed.

Data Analyzed					
Mercosur			Ibero-America		
Cultural Policies	Mercosur	RECAM	AMP	Ibermedia	Interview
Rio Summit (1999)	Interregional Framework Cooperation Agreement (1995)	Creation of RECAM (2003)	AMP Agreement (2008)	Creation of Ibermedia (1997)	16 interviews (2021)
Unesco Convention (2005)	Protocol for Cultural Integration (1996)	37 minutes meetings (2003-2019)	Evaluation Report (2015)	13 Reports (2006-2021)	
European Agenda for Culture in a Globalising World (2007)	Declaration of Mercosur Cultural Integration (2008)	13 Work plans (2003-2019)	Regional Indicative Programme (2007)	Agreement CAACI-EFAD (2016)	

5. MERCOSUR: THE EU AS AN EXPERT

5.1. RECAM

Cooperation with the EU was mentioned in RECAM’s earlier documents where it aims to include the audiovisual sector in the future Mercosur - EU agreement. RECAM proposes a “transfer of experience on the preservation of film patrimony, information system, design and execution of policies and programs” (RECAM, 2004b, p.3). In the following meeting, RECAM “recommends that its representatives take notes

on the cooperation proposal suggested by the European Union” (RECAM, 2004c, p.4). This statement suggests the leadership of the EU.

The first mention of the EU was already indicating cooperation, and specifically, a transfer of expertise. Mercosur justifies the Audiovisual Mercosur Program because it was following the Mercosur external strategy in the promotion of cooperation and the “experience of the European Union as a donor of technical cooperation was interesting for Mercosur” (Mercosur, 2009, p.1) and the strengthening of audiovisual would collaborate to regional integration.

The documents evidenced that RECAM had a general vision of the EU, not specifying which part of the institution it would like to exchange with and not presenting any analysis of the EU audiovisual policies considering its achievements and challenges. RECAM refers to the EU as “European Union” and not a specific institution or audiovisual program. It also appears as “EU representative on the audiovisual sector” (RECAM, 2004c, p.4), “audiovisual sector of the EU” (RECAM, 2005a, p.3). Even the visit of the RECAM delegation was directed to the “European Union” (RECAM, 2004b, p.2). The most specific was the “audiovisual sector of the European Commission” (RECAM, 2005b, p.3).

Besides the technical knowledge, RECAM also demonstrates an interest in the “transfer of resources” (RECAM, 2004b, p.2) and in developing a cooperation proposal based on “what was exposed by the EU representatives and the financial resources made available for that bloc to the cooperation” (RECAM, 2004b, p.2). Chile demonstrated interest in the projects that RECAM “projects with the EU resources” (RECAM, 2008, p.5) indicating the importance of access to resources from the EU. RECAM perceives cooperation as “an opportunity to advance in the construction of regional audiovisual policies” (RECAM, 2009, p.5). Thus, the main ideas implied in the perception of the EU were the expertise that it has, and the resources that it would provide.

5.2. Audiovisual Mercosur Program

The AMP was part of the Regional Indicative Programme (RIP) that was “focused entirely on supporting regional integration, preparing for the implementation of the future Association Agreement and trade-related assistance” (European Commission, 2007, p.4). The program was divided into three priorities: Priority 1: support for Mercosur institutionalization, Priority 2: support for the deepening of Mercosur and implementation of the future EU-Mercosur Association Agreement, and Priority 3: efforts to strengthen civil society participation, knowledge of the regional integration process, mutual understanding and mutual visibility (European Commission, 2007, p.5).

The AMP is part of Priority 3 that also aimed to improve the perception of the EU in Mercosur society, which only sees it as a trade partner “while awareness of the EU as a political entity and knowledge of its integration history and programs are

very low” (European Commission, 2007, p.25). Thus, this program focuses on “creating increased awareness amongst future opinion makers and shapers through EU assistance (which) could potentially create aspirations to emulate and imitate the EU successes” (European Commission, 2007, p.25).

All the priorities were based on the idea of the EU as an expert in supranational integration where “the unique EU experience in the different fields of integration would give a special added value to the process” (European Commission, 2007, p.24). Then, the actions were focused on “the transfer of know-how” (European Commission, 2007, p.29), “transfer of EC experience” (European Commission, 2007, p.31), proposing “technical assistance and training” (European Commission, 2007, p.31), and “providing expertise and assistance for all issues relating to regional integration, the EU experience and the transfer of this experience” (European Commission, 2007, p.36). Thus, the AMP was based on the same transfer ideas and the proposal was centered around the idea of “setting up of a Mercosur Media Programme based on the EU MEDIA Programme” (European Commission, 2007, p.38).

This proposal is aligned with the ideas present in the RIP, where the EU promotes itself as a donor of expertise. However, this was not debated in the RECAM meetings. The documents did not indicate any analysis of the EU media policy or reflection on the results and challenges. No other audiovisual policy was taken into account. This indicates a movement that followed Mercosur's external policy promoted by the EU.

The AMP was perceived as coherent with other EU audiovisual programs, such as MEDIA, MEDIA Internacional, and other cooperation programs, such as Euromed (Mercosur, 2008a, p.23). The AMP mentions the EU programs, but did not elaborate or explain to which extent the AMP would create a dialogue with these programs. Then, the goals established were there to “promote the sense of belonging in Mercosur through the access of their own audiovisual cultural contents” and focused on “strengthening the audiovisual as an instrument to favor the regional integration process” (Mercosur, 2008a, p.24). These goals were related to the RIP and the Protocol for Cultural Integration, in the understanding of culture as a tool to boost integration, but it remains vague how these goals would be drawn from the EU MEDIA Program. Thus, even though the idea of the EU as an expert on supranational audiovisual policies was strongly evidenced in the documents, the operationalization of this expertise remained unclear and leaves us with certain unanswered questions such as: what are the instruments that the EU uses to implement its policies, or what are some of the concrete achievements that the EU can promote?

6. IBERO-AMERICAN AUDIOVISUAL SPACE: THE EU AS A PARTNER

The construction of a common audiovisual space in Mercosur overlaps with the debate at the Ibero-American level since the main Mercosur stakeholders are also engaged in this broader space. The idea of an Ibero-American audiovisual space is a long-lasting project that aims to create supranational mechanisms to integrate the

cinematographies in the region (Dominguez, 2008; Getino, 2007). This project was largely debated and the outcome of this bottom-up process was the creation of the Conference of Ibero-American Cinematographic Activities (CAACI) in 1989, and the Ibermedia Program in 1997.

Ibermedia is a development program to strengthen the Ibero-American market by funding audiovisual projects, mainly focused on co-productions. Today, it involves 23 member states: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Italy, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

Ibermedia was inspired by the European MEDIA Program (Camacho, 2016; Falicov, 2012) since the EU supranational audiovisual policies were positively evaluated (SEGIB, 2009, p.27). When Ibermedia was founded, the idea was to “take as a model the supranational audiovisual integration policy, developed in Europe with the same purpose and positioning: to promote and consolidate a film and audiovisual industry that can compete in the markets with the North American giant” (SEGIB, 2009, p.27).

The ideas associated with the EU are related to the cultural diversity discourse on protecting the audiovisual industry because of its cultural and economic value. Even though the EU provided the initial inspiration for the founding of Ibermedia, there are almost no further mentions of the EU in any other Ibermedia documents, except for one excerpt from the topic of media literacy (SEGIB, 2014, p.12). Even there, the EU was only mentioned as an actor that promotes this topic and was not mentioned or described as a model to be followed.

Recently, CAACI and the European Film Agency Directors (EFAD) signed a joint declaration, expressing their wish to cooperate. This dialogue is reported by Ibermedia as “natural and needed” (SEGIB, 2016, p.61) since the two regions would be stronger in working together to promote their values. These values concern mainly the protection of cultural diversity. It also reveals that the dialogue was inspired by the hesitancy of the producers regarding the European Commission agenda for a Digital Single Market that could impact the co-productions among the regions if the EU decides to propose a regulation based on the exploitation of works on a territory-by-territory basis. Thus, it is motivated by the producer’s interests in guaranteeing market access.

This cooperation declaration is based on the 2005 UNESCO Convention, agreeing on the cultural and economic value of audiovisual products as well as pointing out the need to assure cultural diversity in the digital context. The joint declaration recognized that “Europe and Latin America share the same ambition for their audiovisual industries” (CAACI, 2016, p.1), and based on the same values of “cultural diversity, identity, and intercultural dialogue” (CAACI, 2016, p.1), “they require regulatory frameworks from Governments to deliver fair and balanced economic and cultural relations” (CAACI, 2016, p.1).

Then, a series of proposals were presented aiming to foster co-productions and promote the distribution and circulation of these co-productions. The proposals

were clear, indicating a specific EU institution related to the topic proposed and mentioning the goal that was to be achieved through the cooperation, evidencing knowledge of the EU audiovisual policies. Here, the EU is seen as a partner, and the dialogue is marked by “cooperation and exchange” (CAACI, 2016, p.2), where the EU can also be “inspired by CACI’s successful experience with the Ibermedia TV initiative (CAACI, 2016, p.3). Thus, there is a commitment to “establish regular communication” (CAACI, 2016, p.3) and to cooperate, but without the transfer idea.

The interviews with Ibero-American producers revealed an openness to cooperation with the EU. All the interviewees consider the EU a strategic partner to the development of the Ibero-American audiovisual sector. The ideas are mostly associated with “audiovisual policies to strengthen diversity” (Respondent 3, Producer from Paraguay) where “the debate should be focused on public policies that aim to strengthen diversity and not just market-oriented (Respondent 3, Producer from Paraguay). The EU is seen as a strong investor in its audiovisual sector with interesting policies in “cultural education and media literacy” (Respondent 2, Producer and Director from Ecuador). Thus, it is perceived as having a “high capacity of political interference” (Respondent 9, Producer and Director from Guatemala) in a combination of “political and economic influence” (Respondent 10, Representant of EGEDA² from Spain).

There was also some criticism on the EU relationships with the Ibero-American audiovisual sector where the EU is perceived as having an “erratic participation that lacks continuity” (Respondent 10, Representative of EGEDA from Spain). Another critique is the lack of direct investment by the European producers:

“The Europeans never invest in Latin-American cinema. When they search for movies to co-produce they just do it after receiving public funding, they did not anticipate the resources, there is no equity. So we can not think that the European producers are financing the Latin-American cinema, they finance themselves, and one part of this funding they put in the movie. But the final donor is the statal funding.” (Respondent 1, Producer from Chile).

Thus, the public fundings for co-production played an important role and the producers generally advocate for the creation of interregional funds between Ibero-American and European producers (Respondent 4, Producer and Director from Portugal; Respondent 6, Producer from Argentina; Respondent 10, Representative of EGEDA from Spain; Respondent 13, Producer from Colombia; Respondent 14, Producer and Director from Mexico; Respondent 16, Producer and Director from Peru) because the main idea for cooperation is through film co-production. They see the cooperation as an opportunity to increase co-productions, and consequently have more “access to funding” (Respondent 1, Producer from Chile; Respondent 6, Producer from

2 Association of Services for Audiovisual Producers

Argentina; Respondent 7, Producer and Director from Costa Rica; Respondent 8, Producer from Spain). They also see co-production as valuable to increase distribution opportunities (Respondent 7, Producer and Director from Costa Rica; Respondent 8, Producer from Spain), access to festivals (Respondent 5, Producer and Director from Bolivia; Respondent 7, Producer and Director from Costa Rica), and international market (Respondent 12, Producer and Director from Brazil; Respondent 15, Producer and Director from Panama).

Then, co-production is perceived as a tool to strengthen the audiovisual market and would be beneficial for both regions. The EU is perceived as an opportunity to collaborate where “everybody wins” (Respondent 4, Producer and Director from Portugal), since “the EU searches for good stories in Latin America” (Respondent 5, Producer and Director from Bolivia), and “would gain access to the Latin-American market” (Respondent 15, Producer and Director from Panama), so “it is not a help, the EU also needs market” (Respondent 11, Producer and Director from Dominican Republic).

The unanimous claim for strengthening dialogue with the EU shows that it is still an important actor in the Latin-American audiovisual sector. For the producers, the EU is perceived more as an opportunity to access funding for co-productions than as a model, and none of the interviewees mentioned the idea of transferring the EU audiovisual policies or the EU expertise.

7. DIFFERENT SHAPES FOR AN ABSTRACT MODEL

The findings evidence a difference in the perception of the EU at RECAM and the Ibermedia program. The EU aims to transfer the expertise to Mercosur to further develop a trade agreement with Mercosur. Several cooperations were signed with this purpose, impacting the Mercosur development (Dri, 2010). The EU effort towards Mercosur was aligned with its external policy that seeks to export its supranational model to increase its own legitimacy (Radaelli, 2000; Santander, 2001). The EU was also worried about its perception in Latin America and wants for the AMP to improve its image in the Mercosur society. Thus, the EU led the cooperation and invested in the region, which in return served as a motivation to RECAM which engaged in a transfer, because it considered this to be an opportunity to access material resources. Although the resources provided by the EU were limited (1.860.000 euro), they were attractive for RECAM considering its restricted budget (Fernandes et al., 2020). In the Ibero-American context, producers also highlighted the interest in accessing funding for co-productions. This is in line with Serban and Harutyunyan's (2020) argument that interest in resources plays a significant role in the Latin-American perception of the EU.

For Mercosur, the EU served from the beginning as a reference for supranational policy, attesting its perceived legitimacy (Olsen, 2002). The cooperation with the EU also increases the Mercosur legitimacy since it is engaging with a consolidated

institution (Medeiros et al., 2015). The same can be said about RECAM, where cooperation with the EU would increase its legitimacy and institutionalization. Thus, the search for increasing legitimacy played a role in the cooperation on both sides.

RECAM followed the Mercosur movement as it looked to the EU as a model. The AMP was based on the transfer idea that was part of a broader project to transfer EU expertise. The documents analyzed revealed a lack of clear understanding of the EU audiovisual policy since it did not present any study about it neither concrete strategies to translate the EU audiovisual policies to the Mercosur context. It does not mean that the EU had no achievements in that field. It does mean, however, that RECAM did not critically reflect before deciding to engage in a policy transfer, which resulted in incremental achievements (Canedo et al., 2015). This unreflected transfer indicates the perceived legitimacy of the EU (Olsen, 2002) where the audiovisual policies are perceived as functional even without studies. It also suggests a broader aspirational movement of Mercosur's integration project having the EU as a leading light.

The perceived match is mainly related to the ideas of the understanding of audiovisual as cultural and economic products that need protection based on the cultural diversity argument. However, convergence on the discourse did not guarantee the adoption of the same policies (Radaelli, 2008).

In the RECAM policy documents, the EU is always referred to as a whole, without any mention of a specific program or policy. Thus, RECAM perceived the EU as a political and cultural bloc without any nuances. RECAM looked to the EU as a model but it was not clear what model, if it is related to goals, to specific achievements, or just with the idea of cultural diversity protection. The EU was basically interpreted as a hermetic model and was not perceived completely, and consequently provided RECAM with a vague model that in its lack of concreteness can never be achieved, evidencing more an aspiration movement than an engagement in a learning process (Armstrong, 2006).

Without a clear definition, "the 'model' that emerges from Europe is idiosyncratic, subjective and contradictory" (Pratt, 2009, p.19), and it can be perceived in different ways. For RECAM, the EU is seen as an expert where Mercosur could draw or copy from. However, this perception mainly happens on the political level that is marked by a strong rhetoric character with a low capacity to translate into concrete achievements (Malamud, 2005). From a bottom perspective, the interviews with producers did not indicate the same perception of the EU.

On the Ibero-American level, the EU was also indicated as a model. However, here the reference was more specific: the Ibermedia program should be drawn from the EU MEDIA Program. The EU supranational audiovisual policies are perceived as a counterpoint to the US hegemony and the Ibero-Americans would like to follow the same purpose. Besides the concrete references, Ibermedia develops without the interference of the EU as a model. The documents did not further pursue this purpose and the transfer idea was never proposed. The recent dialogue between the two regions is based on exchange and cooperation discourse where both shared the same

ideas to develop the audiovisual sector. The Ibero-American producers perceive the EU as a strategic partner who could strengthen the audiovisual market by promoting co-production in a relationship that would be beneficial for both.

The Ibero-American space did not have a previous relationship with the EU, as is the case of Mercosur. Some of the countries' members are also part of the EU, such as Spain and Portugal, which could provide a better knowledge of the EU policies and influence the perception of it inside the Ibero-American space. Then, the Ibermedia perception of the EU is based on ideas, that can generate different kinds of dialogue.

Ibermedia is the result of a bottom-up process and it maintains the engagement with its stakeholders (Camacho, 2016; Moguillansky, 2019). Thus, the ideas of the producers are also reflected in the Ibermedia policies. The ideas towards the EU also reflect this bottom-up character, where the producers propose a dialogue based on co-production that could be beneficial for both parties, and an exchange of experience where the EU can also learn from Latin America. The Ibero-American position towards the EU contrasts with the Mercosur top-down approach developed at the political level where RECAM followed a previous EU - Mercosur agreement.

9. CONCLUSION

The findings evidenced that the EU is perceived differently at RECAM and Ibermedia. At RECAM, the EU is perceived as an expert and a model to be followed where dialogue was based on the transfer idea following a broader Mercosur - EU relationship. RECAM aimed to access resources and did not develop a clear investigation of the EU audiovisual policy, where the EU remains an abstract model.

At Ibermedia, the EU was initially pointed out as a model, but later was perceived as a partner. The dialogue is based on cooperation that is perceived to be beneficial for both regions. There is a clear understanding of the EU audiovisual policies and the stakeholders aim to access resources for co-production and consequently gain market access.

In both programs, the values are based on the cultural diversity principle and access to resources played an important role. However, the perception of the EU, the goal of establishing a relationship with it, and the form of dialogue differ.

Thus, the results indicate different perceptions of the EU since it is not a defined concept, in the sense that it can be mobilized according to the context. This exploratory study can motivate further investigations through assessment on how the EU is perceived differently at Mercosur and the Ibero-American space and how distinct perceptions influence the policy choices and impact the implementation of cooperations.

The EU definitely plays a role in shaping audiovisual policies in Latin America. It is nowadays still an important actor with a good fit in regard to the ideas. The regions can benefit from cooperation, but first, it is essential to have a clear definition of the EU and a critical analysis of it. It is recommended to define which EU institutions

would be engaged, what the goals are and the benefits of doing that, and what kind of cooperation would be promoted. In doing so, the EU can be translated into a clear goal and can help to avoid its perception as a hermetic giant in whose footsteps international cultural institutions should follow.

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